MANY DEVICES

ROSELLE MERCIER MONTGOMERY

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MANY DEVICES

BY

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

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TO MY SISTER
CAMILLE MERCIER PARKER

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MANY DEVICES

PRELUDE

In the city of dreadful caverns,
  I have learned to hide
From the night and the stars—but I know
  Where the skies are wide. . . .

Where the hills loom high and lonely
  And the stars lean low. . . .
And there, when the silence calls me,
  I shall rise and go.

I shall reach from the tallest hilltop—
  It will not be far—
To the diamond fringe of evening
  And pluck me a star.

And I, who to troublesome clamor
  Am inured so long,
Shall awake when a bird, dawn-stirring,
  Spears the night with song.

But I shall return to tell them,
  Who surround me here,
How the stars, so far from these towers,
  To the hills are near.

I shall hasten back to the revelers
And I shall explain
How the night, which they strive to vanquish,
Is so cleanly slain.

And to prove my words to the doubters
Who believe me wrong,
I shall bring, out of night and silence,
A star and a song!

PART ONE

MARPESSA: OR ANY WOMAN

Marpessa, loved by the god Apollo, and by Idas, a mortal man, chose the man, fearing the god would not prove faithful to her.

THAT she had chosen well
Marpessa knew—
Was ever god to mortal woman true?

But Idas, now,
Oh, he was faithful, good,
And he provided well, as husbands should.

Fine food, soft raiment,
Jewels, had she not?
Women, she knew, were envious of her lot.

And yet, and yet—
Beside her always trod
A splendid shadow, a remembered god.

Now and again were days
When, in the press
Of solid living, she knew wistfulness.

Each day they brought to her
Some whispered story
Of maids bedazzled by the young god's glory.

And, hearing, she would say,
"Oh, I was wise!"
Then, suddenly, the tears would blind her eyes.

Above the gossips'
Eager whisperings,
She seemed to hear the beat, the beat of wings!

BIOGRAPHY

THE essence of me will elude the line
  That retails merely such things as I did.
  From my historians much will be hid
Of what was deeply, intimately mine.
When I am dead some faithful chronicler
  Perhaps may tell how I did thus, or so—
  What I refrained from doing who will know?
These will escape my best biographer:
The beckoning paths on which I never fared,
  The secret ways down which I stole a look,
  The longed-for journeys that I never took,
The bright, strange things I dreamed, but never
      dared!

Deep in the grave my dust will stir and laugh
At what is written in my epitaph.

MAN

A MOTE in the sun,
  But from where?
A spark,
  From what fire flung hither?
A note of a tune,
  But what air?
A sigh on the wind,
  Carried whither?

A compound of clay
  And of fire;
Dust of earth,
  And the image of God;
King of brutes,
  And the slave of desire;
Winged Psyche,
  Content in the clod!

A voyager
  On a strange way;
A traveler
  Haled in a room
By Some One
  And bidden to stay,

Unknowing for what
Or by whom. . . .

What is man? It echoes, the cry!
We question, we challenge, we die!

THIS INTERVAL

Oh, yes, this is indeed
A charming ball!
The orchestra is good,
The floor, just right;
I love the dancing,
I am happy, quite!
Strange, is it not?
I cannot quite recall
From where I came,
Or why I came at all.
I dance and dance again
But do not know
Where, when the dance is over,
I shall go,
Nor who will claim me
When this interval
Is done. . . .
The music haunts me.
Surely I
Have heard it long ago somewhere,
Somewhere!
But it escapes my memory,
The air—

Though I have known it well
In time gone by.

What matters it?
At least the ball is gay!
But my new partner comes
To claim me now
And I must go with him,
I cannot stay—
This interval is over!
With a bow
The stranger bends
To make his smiling claim.
How awkward
That I do not know his name!
Perhaps you know—
Tell me, under your breath. . . .
Ah, so? Of course!
Now I remember—Death!

THE MODERNS AND PAN

I HEARD the pipes of Pan there in the wood;
Outmoded, quite, but, somehow, strangely good.

Old Pan is one we moderns still permit
To live, for Pan has punch, no doubt of it.

A little coaching, here and there, not much,
Would give his work the ultra-modern touch.

Without that touch in art and poetry
And music, nothing counts today, you see.

To tell him this with gentle, kindly tact
Would be, I felt, merely a friendly act.

How could he know, a pre-Victorian,
How things have changed since nymphs from kisses
ran?

And so I sought him out. "Old Pan," I said,
"This stuff of yours is out of date and dead.

"Come, now, make new tunes for your pipes, old
man!"
"*Can tunes be new?*" slow-smiling, queried Pan.

"Well, then, new themes!" I said insistently.
"*Is not love always new?*" asked Pan of me.

"But times are changed, and men and women, too!"
"*Find me,*" said Pan, "*a man or woman—new!*"

TO HELEN, MIDDLE-AGED

I

THE strife on Ilium's windy plain is still;
Cool, now, the blood that in the veins of men
So madly coursed to view your beauty when
The Greek and Trojan fates hung on your will;
Unkindling, eyes that could not look their fill
Upon the wonder that was Helen then.
They will not wake to burn for you again,
Those thirsting fires that drove mad men to kill.

Now ships and towers are ashes on the wind
And Paris, dead, your spring-time shepherd lover . . . .
Here by your side, your lawful liege leans over
To smooth, mechanically, your graying hair
And say, in that calm voice, forever kind,
"Please, dear, a stitch, my tunic has a tear!"

II

You take the garment from his hand and smile . . . .
"That hand struck Paris!" you think suddenly
And all the facile floods of memory,
Unsealed, pour over you. Your hands, meanwhile,

Are dutifully busy, as your lord
  Relates to you the details of the chase;
  You listen, with a half-averted face,
And give him back an absent-minded word.

For far away a cool, clean wind is blowing
  High on a hill, and you are there again;
    Your Paris is beside you; green, the spring,
And warm the young blood in you, leaping, flowing;
  His lips are on your throat—*and then, and then*
    You are this Helen, here, remembering!

III

The tunic mended, with a "Thank you, dear!"
  Your Menelaus takes it from your hands
  That, snow and rose-leaf once, laid their commands
On kings and kingdoms in a long-gone year.
Transparent, fragile, but unwrinkled still,
  The small, domestic tasks engage them now . . . .
  Strange, that today you should remember how
Young Paris crushed and kissed them on a hill.

And yet, not strange. You are not first, ah, no!
    Of sister women, nor will you be last,
  To summon spectres from the passioned past

While you sit quietly and listen so
To your lord's tale—tasting the tempered joys
Time leaves to Helens who outlive their Troys.

IMMEMORIAL EVE

I THINK that Eve went musing,
That she may
Have fetched, among the flowers,
A furtive sigh,
Or dried a tear,
Or cast a wistful eye
On Adam sometime,
Busy, in man's way.
About the dull affairs
Of every day—
Too occupied to ask,
As he went by,
"What is it, dear?
Come, tell me what and why!"
Manlike, he fancied her
Content with play.

But they were long,
Those idle, garden hours;
I think she wearied some
Of birds and flowers;
Of Adam, taking everything
For granted.
A Wise One, guessing what

She vaguely wanted,
Began to whisper,
Whisper in her ear. . . .
The story is quite commonplace,
My dear!

THE SPHINX

She looks up
To the unsolved pyramids;
Down on the riddle, Nile;
And outward
Over enigmatic sands;
And smiles her cryptic smile.

Does she smile thus
To hear upon man's lips,
Above the winds that blow
The dust of sages
Into futile drifts,
The tinkling words, "I know"?

TEA IN HONGKONG

In that good ship, my school geography,
I roved the seven seas. No port so far
Or foreign but it was familiar
To that good galleon that carried me.
The isles of Greece seemed near and neighborly;
I was, oh! quite at home in Zanzibar;
I'd take my ease in Cairo's bright bazaar
Or fare to Hongkong for a cup of tea.

My wishes were the winds that drove my prow,
My dreams, the sails. But I, I roam no more,
For now my bark of life is tied to shore
By love, the anchor, and my tethered bow
No longer cleaves strange waters. It is long
Since I furled sail to sip tea in Hongkong!

PALIMPSEST

Sometimes you wear a look that once I knew;
  Before you speak, I know what you will say;
A phantom memory stirs. This place and yo
  Were of my life in some forgotten day.

The parchment, life, was written on, I know,
  In æons past by us. Uncounted years
Above it wrote their superscripts. Below
  The writing stays, though dimmed by time and
    tears.

A blurred remembrance still survives in me
  Of that old life and you. You touch some string,
Some vibrant string, long hushed, to melody . . .
  And I am stirred—almost remembering!

ATALANTA

After the Race

THESE golden apples! And Hippomenes
Still thinks he stayed my flying feet with these!

True, in the race that other men had run
Only to death, his strength and swiftness won;
Or was it strategy? He tossed, indeed,
The gold before me and I lost my lead;
My pausing, if for but a moment's space,
To pick the apples up, gave him the race—
So much as this he and the world know well,
But there is somewhat more I do not tell.

Each time he folds me to his heart again,
I think, I almost think, I will explain—
And then I muse on men and I refrain!

Oh, yes! he might be glad to know—but then
The rôle of conqueror is dear to men;
Now I am symbol of his victory,
And he, he values me accordingly.
What if he knew the victory was won
Before the goal was set, the race begun?

So long, so long I had been known to fame
As unattainable—until he came!
Too long, perhaps. But who was there to guess
An Atalanta touched by loneliness?
And who could dream that thoughts came to my
mind,
Of prisoned Daphne sighing on the wind?
Of Syrinx, by the river, safe indeed
But moaning at her fate—to be a reed?
And who could know it sometimes came to me
That gods take maidens' prayers too seriously?

And yet, and yet, I could not seem to bear
The satyr-look my suitors' eyes would wear;
A look that summed me up appraisingly,
That seemed to strip my draperies from me.
I would not stay, to stand before them, shamed;
I fled from them in some dark fear unnamed.
And oh, the swift, sick dread, the wild alarms
When they outstretched to me their hairy arms!
And when they drew on me with panting breath,
I whispered to my heart, "Oh, better, death!"

And then one day he came! I marked him there
Among the suitors. I seemed unaware,
I turned away indifferently from him,
Coolly I let my maidens oil each limb,
Lace on my sandals, calmly took my place—
But well I knew I would not win this race!

I had a maiden's and a runner's pride;
Both must be saved, but if he failed, he died!
I knew I was the fleeter, if I tried . . . .

These golden apples? They served well indeed
As subterfuge—excuse to slack my speed.
But he goes proudly, my Hippomenes,
Believing that he won the race with these;
And somewhat boastful of the strategy
By which he gained the victory—and me.

Sometimes I almost think I will explain
And then I muse on men—and I refrain!
Women are wise who think—and think again!

WASTE

She is a shallow, tinkling cup;
Life lifts her up
And fate, the muddler, pours therein,
    Oh, carelessly,
Or else in jest,
    As well may be,
Up to the brim,
The red, the rare, soul-wine of him.
It is a sorry thing
    To see
How, when the foolish cup that holds
But just so much, no more,
    Is filled—
The bright, abundant wine
    Is spilled.

SPECULATION

Sometimes I think
It may be dull up there
When all the saints of earth have climbed the stair.

When we stand saved
Who never had a doubt—
What will there be for us talk about?

Unless perhaps
Some should be saved, a few
Who had their doubts on earth what creeds were true.

Who, brave to doubt,
But foolish to declare
Their doubting, got thēmselves well-punished there.

Shall we not lift our brows,
If angels do,
And look at them and murmur, "Fancy, you!"

And we'll be occupied again,
No doubt—
At least there'll be a lot to talk about!

ANACHRONISM

I

A PRIVATE brougham in our street today,
With dashing horses, sleek and satiny,
And men upon the box in livery,
Halts curious passers-by upon their way
And makes them rub their staring, wondering eyes.
The coach of Cinderella, all complete,
Here in this modern, motor-crowded street,
Would scarcely wake more interest and surprise!

I tell myself that it must be a dream—
This coach and pair cannot be what they seem;
They are a vision of the vanished past;
A fairy tale that will not, cannot last. . . .
The coach will be a pumpkin in a trice;
The liveried men and satin horses, mice!

II

But while I stare, they do not vanish, no!
Then, suddenly, a house door opens wide
And from its depths a lady steps outside. . . .
Pray do not ask if she looks thus or so,

Nor what her age, the fashion of her gown—
One word must here suffice, an old, dear word
That makes all adjectives diffuse, absurd:
It is—a lady who comes tripping down!

The coach door closes with a muffled bang;
The footman mounts the box, the horses start,
And I, a modern, in my modern heart,
Am much surprised to feel a sudden pang. . . .
The lady in her coach has borne away
The charm and glamour of a by-gone day!

THE FATES

THE fates are not quite obdurate.
They have a grim,
Sardonic way
Of granting men who supplicate
The things they wanted—
Yesterday!

THE WALL

THE eyes of Eve looked on another world
Than that which Adam saw. In Eden there,
They differed strangely, this domestic pair
So lately from the cosmic chaos hurled.

Each thing which they beheld seemed different
To him, to her. They struggled to explain
Their varying points of view, but all in vain!
Eve never could quite guess what Adam meant.

And Adam could not comprehend at all
Eve's strange reactions—her distastes, her fears,
Her puzzling smiles, her still more baffling tears;
Misunderstanding made a solid wall.

The wall still stands, so there are some to say,
Dividing man's from woman's world today.

DAEDALUS

Or Any One About to Adventure

LET the dull, wise ones
  Stay below and stare,
Too dull to dream,
  Ever too wise to dare—
  I, I have watched far eagles in the air!

Let them laugh now
  And gibe at dreams and wings,
Who can be happy
  With accepted things—
  I lift my eyes to where the Sun God swings!

Let each attain
  The sleekness of his sire,
As he nods, safe,
  Beside his own hearthfire—
  The rim of farthest space bounds my desire!

Yes, let them be
  Content to plow and plod,
Each in the furrow
  That his forebears trod—
  My eyes are free of serfdom to the sod!

Let them live out their lives,
  Feed, breed and die,
Children of earth,
  In earth's deep bosom lie—
  The kin of birds, of winds, of gods, am I!

Sky meadows call me
  From the rutted tracks;
I glimpse far stars
  Above dull, bended backs—
  Ah, what if dreams be dust, if wings be wax?

Once, if once only,
  I shall see and know!
Faring the ether,
  If it need be so,
  To splendid death—*on wings, on wings I go!*

ALL ASHORE!

The throbbing monster, tethered to the pier,
  Chafes at restraining ropes—she hears the sea!
She has no pity for the human tear,
  The parting sigh, repeated endlessly.
These pygmies and their griefs cannot delay
  Her going to the tryst that she must keep;
Upon the hour she will be on her way
  In answer to the summons of the deep.

Dear one, dear one, a little moment more!
  O foolish, babbling words upon our lips—
Hark, now, the gong, the cry of "All ashore!"
  The monster moves to go the way of ships!
Here by the rail, I find an empty place—
There on the fading pier, your face, your face!

THEY WHO RETURN

THEY who return from far and foreign shores
Find fond lips waiting them—but ears unheeding;
There is no one will listen to their tales
Of strange, bright sands, swift gales and good ships speeding.

Those whom they left behind are still intent
Upon the small affairs of home, the baking,
The rainy washday, and the neighbor's guest—
They listen only for a breath's intaking.

Then they take up again their chattering;
They will not let the rover tell his story
Of the far countries that his eyes have seen,
The wonder of strange cities and their glory.

"*Though one should come to them, back from the dead,*
They would not listen!" so the Master said.

TO A STAINED-GLASS SAINT

You irritate me
With your calm repose;
It seems so easy for you to be good!
Were I in your place, though, I think I could
Be rated as a saint myself—who knows?

Had I been placed and fixed
Within a frame,
In an environment that suited me,
Surrounded by a studied harmony,
My temper would be sweet; my face, the same!

I should be circumspect
And saintly, too,
If I were cursed with your publicity;
Yes, I'd be good in a transparency
Where all the world could see just what I do!

And it's a help, as saints have found
Before,
To have your worst faults all quite blotted out
By kindly paint! I'd be improved, no doubt,
If some of my own faults were painted o'er!

Indeed, I could be good, myself,
Dear Saint,
And all the world would look up to me, too,
Were virtue for me, as it seems for you,
Environment, publicity and paint!

OLD ACQUAINTANCE

I KNOW those smiling lips,
Those slanting eyes;
Your voice has cadences
I recognize.

We meet tonight
Amid formality;
You bend above my hand
And smile at me—

And then pass on
As though in unconcern,
But I would meet your eyes
If I should turn.

At dinner, you
Are seated next to me;
So, only so, I knew
That it would be.

They are inconsequent,
The words you say;
As lightly I reply
And turn away.

But well I understand
  And well you know
That we have met
  In some dim long ago.

Once you were Pan;
  And in that sylvan past,
I was a foolish maid
  Who ran—too fast!

GALATEA TO PYGMALION

Pygmalion, you were a daring one
To wake a woman from the dreaming stone.

It was a male intrusion to evoke
Me from the marble with a chisel stroke.

Alone there in my virgin tenement
I was serene, untroubled, quite content—

With no possessive one to say, "Do this!",
"Stay here!", "Go there!", or, "Come, my love, a kiss!"

I am bewildered now; I find it strange
That hearts of flesh should have so wide a range;

That human life should hold so much of stress,
So much of wonder and of wistfulness.

It is a great adventure to be human,
A greater venture still, to be a woman!

In my bewilderment, it comes to me
That there was peace in immobility.

But what has marble that can match the bliss
Of lips, warm lips, beneath a lover's kiss?

And how can peace compare to hot, sweet pain?
What flesh, love-wounded, would be stone again?

It was a gesture of male arrogance
To break my dream, to wake me from my trance.

You were a daring and intrusive one—
I bless your chisel, my Pygmalion!

WAKING

THE moon is an orange wafer
  Laid flat on a velvet sky;
The wind in the dark deodars
  Is a sigh.

I am come again—ah, wonder!
  To a well-remembered place.
This, this, is my garden, wearing
  The old grace.

It lies now, white in the moonlight,
  Scarfed by the yellow mist,
Like a pale, veiled woman, waiting
  To be kissed.

They were dreams, then, dreams only,
  The long, intervening years,
And all the white northern winters,
  And my tears?

The scent of the jasmine, sleeping
  On the breast of the southern night,
Is sweet as a whispered promise
  Of delight.

A mocking-bird in a pine tree
  Flings on the perfumed air
A melody more wounding
  Than the heart can bear.

My window looks on the garden,
  The garden leads to a gate.
But what are gates to a lover?
  I wait, I wait.

A voice is calling, calling—
  I hear and I rise to go.
What means this pale, cold moonlight
  On the snow?

How came I here by the casement,
  My hands on the frosted pane?
Oh, sleep, you have tricked me, tricked me.
  I will sleep again!

FOREBODING

Proprietary passion burns in you—
They trouble you, the loves of my dead past,
You who would be my first love and my last;
Lord of my life—past, present, future, too!

But what enchantments, whose endearing ways
Once held you, wake in me no jealousy.
Whom you once loved, what is that now to me?
I lay no liens upon your yesterdays.

No, rather I would have you cherish yet
The women who leaned once to your caress,
And think of them sometimes with tenderness,
I would not have you utterly forget . . .

Because, belovèd, oh! because of this—
Some day I shall be one who knew your kiss!

SEQUEL

They deemed themselves supremely justified.
Was theirs the fault that they had met too late?
Must they tread paths forever separate
Because of dull convention, or of pride,
Each to a cold and loveless union tied,
When love awaited them, importunate?
No, they would wrest their happiness from fate,
Casting their fears and scruples all aside!

But, after, trysts that they had one time kept
Came to their minds and tortured them. She wept
Uneasily were he detained; and he,
When she was absent, pondered moodily.
As though a bat had brushed them with its wing,
They found no refuge from remembering!

ANSWER

Forbear to love? And am I bidden so?
Go,
Forbid the flowers their turning to the sun;
Deny
To the birds the sky,
To the bee, the rose;
Compel the tree
To stand erect before the wind that blows;
Bid the rivers run
Back from the sea;
Command
The waves to be
As static as the land;
Make the tides forswear
The mandates of the moon—
So soon
As these are done,
So soon will I forbear
To love, only so soon!

ONE WOMAN TO ANOTHER

Oh, never tell him
That he loves you less
And do not speak to him
Of faithlessness.

Go softly, loving one,
And never dare
To name to him the name
Of one more fair.

It may be you have missed
His tenderness;
But do not charge its lack,
Or let him guess.

What though his small
Indifferences grieve you,
Do not declare love dead—
He might believe you!

THOUGH LOVE WENT BY

I WILL not say, "O love me, or I die!"
So much of life is quite
Apart from you,
That it would hold me,
Though you proved untrue—
Yes, I should still live on, though love went by.

Day still would follow day, demanding me;
Each crowded hour
Would claim from me a smile;
No time would be for grief,
No little while
Vouchsafed to weep for your inconstancy.

But my dark web would lose its scarlet thread;
I should not go
As though to music heard;
But as one walks a wood
Where every bird
Is mute, where every flower is dead.

What use to cry, "O love me, or I die!"?
Life would drag on and on, though love went by!

TO AN UNFAITHFUL FRIEND

I COULD not, if I would, give you again
My love and faith that once were wholly yours,
For they were never gifts of mine to give,
As trinkets one may pass from hand to hand.
But rather were they living things that grew
Deep in the secret places of my heart
Slowly, as oaks grow in an ancient wood.
Such trees defy, because their roots are deep,
The stress of storms, the fury of the floods;
So with my love and faith; they could withstand
Storms of suspicion, floods of doubt and fear,
Because they were rock-rooted in my heart.
But you, you were their sun; and when you turned
Away from me, they withered there and died.
No tears of mine can make them live again!

LIKE A PRISONED SWORD

Upon our lips, unspoken,
  Lies a word
Sheathed in our silence
  Like a prisoned sword.

Acquaint with fire and keen,
  Instinct with power,
They wait, the sword and word,
  They wait their hour!

THE WOMAN SPEAKS

I WOULD have given you my golden casket,
You asked of me a lesser thing instead;
The gold one waited you, if you should ask it—
You chose a cask of lead.

I would have spent beyond all stint or measure
To bring your lightest, lightest wish to pass;
I would have made you free of all my treasure—
You stole a coin of brass.

You filched the foolish trinket of my laughter
And robbed me of the bauble of my mirth,
But left my tears untouched. I found them, after—
You did not know their worth.

I made no sign as I watched you depart—
You took my kiss, who might have had my heart!

SECOND GROWTH

Now all the great Victorians are dead,
And better so," a youthful critic said.

"Although they were esteemed in their own day,
They did not write or paint the modern way.

"They overshadowed us—we could not grow;
But now they all are gone, and better so!"

That day I passed a place I once had known,
A wood where giant forest trees had grown,

Brave trees that reared their feathered helmets high,
That knew the secrets of the earth and sky;

Trees too discreet to tell the mysteries
Their roots and summits knew to every breeze;

Trees I had often sought in reverence
For their gray wisdom, their green reticence.

The giants now are felled; where they once stood
Young saplings smartly strive to be a wood!

PURPOSE

EARTH's creator, resting
In a pensive mood,
Mused on his creations,
Finding each one good.

Each thing for a purpose;
For its purpose, right,
As, the sun for noon time,
Moon and stars for night.

Earth for all the stolid;
For the rovers, seas;
Flowers, for their perfume;
For the flowers, bees.

Valleys sweet for comfort
And for courage, hills;
Rivers for adventuring;
For contentment, rills.

Beasts for burden bearing;
Man, for supremacy;
And woman, oh, well, woman,
For—variety!

GARDEN GRACE

A Poem for a Garden Club

It has been said how Eve went lonely there
In Eden, that most perfect garden place;
And how she sometimes showed a wistful face
Among the flowers that did not need her care,
The bloom that did not droop or grow less fair,
That never knew the blight of bug or weed
To mar or mark its loveliness. Indeed
Perfection is a cruel thing to bear!

Had there been, now, some sickly flower or shrub
To tempt her idle hands to dig and grub,
There would have been, I think, less lure for her
In that soft murmur of the Whisperer;
She would have learned the garden grace, content;
And earth's first story would be different!

THE GAME

THE beldame, Fate, has dealt me out a hand
And set me down to play. I know no rules,
Nor who my partner is, nor what the stakes.
I scarcely know the value of the cards.
"O Fate," I cry, "you drew me in the game,
I pray you now, come stand here by my side
And teach me how to play. I do not know
This game of yours!" Fate laughs, but does not stir,
And from her place calls shrilly out, "Your play!"

RECOGNITION

I MET a dryad
In my path today.
Strange, it was on a crowded city way.

She did not go
On dancing feet and bare,
No roses wreathed the dusk of her soft hair.

Ah, no, she went
Quite fashionably gowned;
With smartest of French hats her head was crowned.

Sandals she wore
But of the modern kind.
The people who passed by her all were blind.

A dryad went among them,
All unguessed.
They only marked her pretty and well dressed.

They would have known her
In a dusky wood.
Here in the crowd, one, only, understood.

Things hidden from
Unseeing eyes of man
Are quickly caught and clearly read by Pan!

And when a dryad looks
From woman-eyes
Be sure, be very sure, that she is wise. . . .

I went correctly garbed
And well-shod, too,
But when the dryad passed me by, she knew!

QUESTION

O CHILD of mine, whose crib I bend above,
I wonder, as I lean and look at you,
Will you be troubled by sea-fever, too?
Will far-off places summon you to rove?
Or will you never hear the sea at all,
Or the cry of sails? Will your own hearthplace fire
Prove the one beacon of your heart's desire,
Your dreams be bounded by your garden wall?

The gods of chance decreed my destiny.
My house and garden give me much to do.
But if those jesting gods would bend to me
What, best belovèd, would I ask for you—
Far lands, strange shores, the perilous wide sea,
Or calm contentment with a garden view?

IF THEY COULD LEARN

THE house is too large now and it is neat
And still, so quiet! All the dragging day
I sit and listen for the sound of feet,
For voices that have died away.

There was a time, and not so long ago,
When this same house was very much too small;
It was a puzzle then how to bestow
My brood, to make it hold them all.

And almost never was it orderly!
There would be careless toys and coats and hats
Where never hats or coats or toys should be;
It teemed with puppies and stray cats!

And there were always feet upon the stair
And voices shouting from the wide-flung door
The eager cry of "Mother, are you there?"—
A cry that comes to me no more.

All houses grow to be too large at last
And take on quiet, they that have known laughter,

When life, pied piper, calling youth, has passed
And youth has heard and followed after.

. . . . . .

There would be less of sorrowing, I think,
If houses—and hearts, too—could learn to shrink!

SHINING TOWERS

I WATCH them at their toil, the laborers.
Like crawling ants they seem to come and go
In restlessness unceasing, in and out,
But what they build they do not seem to know.

The master mind has made a perfect plan
That must be wrought and finished by the skill
Of those who toil but do not comprehend,
Yet who, unknowing, carry out his will.

Theirs is the labor; his, creation's joy;
To him alone is it vouchsafed to see
The shining towers! The toilers labor on.
They catch no vision of the towers to be!

Day in, day out, they plod, the laborers,
Blind ones, who do not see beyond the hour.
I bend my back, too, to the tasks of life—
Do I, unknowing, build a shining tower?

BUT IN THE NIGHT

The steamers chatter in the bay;
All day, all night, they cry and call—
But life is loud above. By day
I do not hear the ships at all.

But in the night, borne on the breeze,
Their voices come. They call and cry,
And spell for me far ports, strange seas;
And then, I listen then—and sigh!

EVERY MAN

Every man holds in his heart a dream.
Every man's dream takes him far away,
  Away and beyond to the rim of day.
Every man glimpses a rush-light gleam
That lures and beckons him on in dream.

Every man, every man hears the call
  Of far, high mountains, of strange, deep seas,
  Of dim old forests with giant trees,
Where the foot of man has not trod at all.
Every man, every man hears the call.

Every man harbors a strange, wild man
  Who tears and tears at the heart of him,
  Who would cast away all his garments trim,
Who would take and keep what his bare hands
      can.
Every man harbors a strange, wild man.

Every man, every man would be free,
  Free of his ties and free of his loves,
  Free of the things that the world approves.
Every man dreams he will some day be
Free of his chains, of his fetters, free.

Every man knows he will never go;
He knows, he knows he must always stay,
He must hide the dream in his heart away,
He must keep the wild man deep below.
Every man knows he will never go!

I JOURNEYED IN A VALLEY

I JOURNEYED in a valley quite alone.
I traveled wearily a way unknown,
There in the Half-Way Land, where ill ones go—
A shadow-world the well can never know.

About me there were hills; they shut away
The road I traveled from the light of day.
I saw no living thing, no bright bird flew
Along the darkened way, no flower grew.

I longed, I longed to see the sun and sky,
But all the hills of pain were high, so high!
And all the upward paths were rough and steep,
The valley where I journeyed, dark and deep!

And in the valley there a river flowed;
A purple ship upon its bosom rode;
The ship, I seemed to know, awaited me
To go, upon the flood tide, out to sea.

The ship's name, I seemed, too, to know, was Death,
But I was weary, I was spent for breath;
And high, the hills of pain, so hard and high.
And I could climb no more, I would not try!

The world beyond, I knew, was wide and sweet,
But far, too far away for tired feet.
It would be easier, I felt, to slip
Along the gentle path down to the waiting ship.

Because the sick forget, who come again,
Back from the shadows, to the world of men,
I cannot tell what more befell me there
In that strange Half-Way Land where ill ones fare.

I only know I found the sun and sky,
That something urged me once again to try
The hills, that life would not let go of me,
Nor let me drift out on the ship to sea.

The paths of life are wonderful and sweet.
Again I tread them and with eager feet. . . .
But I go softly, I, who understand
What things are learned there in the Half-Way
Land!

UPON A NIGHT

Upon a soft night in the East,
A great, new star shone bright,
The darkness that the earth had known
Was touched with strange, sweet light.

Beneath the star there, on a hill,
Stood shepherds, wondering
To see that new light in the sky,
To hear the angels sing.

And on her bed of straw that night
The mother Mary smiled,
Among the gentle, friendly beasts,
Upon her new-born child.

Until that night, the earth had known
No other right than might;
No other god than one of wrath,
No rein but that of fright.

The world had not dreamed brotherhood,
Nor succor for the weak;
It had no help for helplessness,
No mercy for the meek.

But on that night when shone the star,
And, guided by its flame,
The wise ones, watching for the sign,
From far-off kingdoms came—

When shepherds heard there on the hill,
As they stood wondering,
The sound earth had not heard before,
The herald angels sing—

And when the mother Mary smiled,
And, tender, bent above
The small, new son there at her breast,
Earth knew, at last, of love!

ON THE DEATH OF A YOUTH

He chose the flood tide and the open sea!
Far countries and strange islands
He would know;
His questing craft would brook no dull restraint,
The great adventure called him.
He must go.

Tried waters and safe harbors never were
For him. He heard the waves
That ride
And roar and break. He saw them beckon him
To what lies there, beyond the bar
Outside.

He would have chafed, tied to the dock of life,
Would never choose
To lie upon the shore
Of age, a derelict, stilled by its sands,
When tides should mount
And stir and sting no more.

Life could not hold his eager galleon;
With straining timbers,
Canvas running free,

Through flying foam—he sought the wide beyond,
He chose the flood tide
And the open sea!

THE SONG OF THE BIRD MAN

Brother am I to the flying things
As up I mount on my flashing wings,
That lift and soar as my motor sings.

Voyager of the blue am I,
Traveler of the trackless sky.
Yes, I am one with the things that fly.

Joy of the hovering gulls I know
When restless waters lie green below,
And great, swift ships to my wings seem slow.

Joy of the soaring eagle is mine,
When mountains fade to a dim blue line,
As high I soar in the clear sunshine.

Like golden ribbons the rivers gleam,
Like checker-boards all the valleys seem;
Earth, with its cares, like a dim, old dream.

Beneath me, man and his work seem small;
City towers, I top them all;
Like ants, below me, the earth-bound crawl.

How can they know, poor creeping things,
Gladness of living that flying brings,
Madness of motion, the joy of wings?

Life? It is mine in the ether clear!
Love? Let it wait—I will have no fear!
Death? Let it come—I will meet it here!

OH, STRANGE THE LOOK!

Oh, strange the look of deep content they
wear,
The newly dead! Have you not marked it there?

So soon, so soon, they lose the agony;
So soon their faces wear a radiancy.

You who have bent to mourn above your dead,
Have you not drawn back, wondering, comforted?

Why look they so? We, here, can but surmise—
Has death with some new wisdom made them wise?

Life troubled them with its trivialities;
Do they smile now to face realities?

On narrow, anxious paths the living tread;
Do they go wide, sweet ways, the smiling dead?

Upon strange journeys here their footsteps fared
To ends unknown. Are shining goals now bared?

The riddle, life, the quick can never guess;
It baffles us, eludes our eagerness.

We seek the books and sages wistfully
To find the answer to mortality!

Does death impart the secret, as they go,
To those who lie here smiling? *Do they know?*

LAODAMIA

When her husband Protesilaus was slain before the walls of Troy, Laodamia begged the gods to be allowed to talk with him an hour. The request was granted. Mercury led Protesilaus back to the upper world. When Protesilaus died a second time, Laodamia died with him.

HER lord lay dead.
  And all the level, drab and lonely years,
  Untenanted and empty but for tears,
Stretched on ahead.

Beside his bier
  She raised her white face to the bending sky
  And poured her prayers out to the gods on high.
They would not hear.

Gods are so far!
  Their ears were deafened then by clash of arms;
  They could not hear above the loud alarms
Of Ilium's war.

The careless sky,
  Where bright Apollo took his course by day,
  Upon whose breast at night slim Dian lay,
Gave back her cry.

"O gods above!"
She cried in prayer, "You know the woman heart,
That women ever hold themselves apart,
Aloof, from love.

"Lovers must guess—
It is a woman trick half to conceal
Their hearts. They will not ever quite reveal
Their tenderness.

"And so with me.
I would not let my lord and lover know;
My deepest heart I would not ever show.
Ah, misery!

"And now, too late,
Too late to bend and whisper him and say
Small words that would have joyed him yesterday.
Oh, bitter fate!

"Great ones above,
I pray you now to bring him back to me
An hour, one, of all eternity,
One hour—for love!

"Let Mercury,
Who shepherds those dark flocks, the shades of men,

Restore him to me for an hour—and then,
Oh, then, take me!"

Her anguished cry
Distraught with love, repeated endlessly,
At last, at last, touched with its poignancy
The gods on high.

Their awful power
Brought back her lord—back to the world of men,
Back from the shadows, to her arms again,
One little hour.

When it was past,
Her lover whispered, "Death was none too dear
A price for this, this one hour with you here—
I know at last!"

And, happily,
She looked deep in his eyes—at last, content,
And followed, smiling, when he, smiling, went,
With Mercury.

THE EAGLE

On the Death of Woodrow Wilson

THE eagle has passed on into the blue
And all the chattering of the sparrows dies.
They could not bear to see the eagle rise
Beyond the reaches that their small wings knew,
Above the housetops they could compass too—
But though they strove to blind the eagle's eyes
With bickering wings, to stay him with their cries,
He rose and passed, above, beyond, their view.

An eagle always is a lonely one.
The far heights call to him and he must go;
But little birds cannot look on the sun,
And what an eagle knows they cannot know.
When he is gone the small ones know, at last,
That there, above their heads, an eagle passed.

PART TWO

GOD LOVES NEW ENGLAND

God loves New England, I am sure of it.
I feel His love in all its loveliness,
As though His hand had lingered to caress
The beauty He had fashioned, bit by bit.

Yes, that He made it slowly, I think, too,
Not in a mood of epic tragedy,
As when He carved the canyon's majesty,
And flung the Rockies up to pierce the blue;

And not in awful anger, as when He
The torrent of Niagara let loose;
But for His creature, man, and for his use,
He made New England's sweet serenity.

And God must love the beauty man has made.
I think He must feel pleasure when He sees
Above the old stone fences, apple trees
Bend down to give the weary travelers shade.

And He must love the villages, the neat
White cottages, with hollyhocks about,
The slender spires, where the bells ring out
Above the elms that shade the quiet street.

And I am sure God listens when a bell
From such a spire rings out upon the air
To summon all the villagers to prayer.
Ah, yes, I think God loves New England well!

And that He made it in a tender mood,
I, who am not New England born, still guess—
I feel His love in all its loveliness. . . .
God made New England and He found it good!

IMPRESSIONS OF PROVINCETOWN

I

COMMERCIAL STREET

ALONG the curving brightness of the bay,
The hurried little street runs like a song;
Way-up-along, around, and down-along,
It takes its lilting, winding, vivid way
Between small shops and smaller houses, gay
With zinnias, petunias, hollyhocks,
Hooked rugs, ships' models, figureheads, old clocks
And modernistic paintings of today.

Art students, tourists, townsfolk, fishermen,
Elbow each other; motors warily
Dodge horse-drawn carts; great buses, thundering
From distant towns, keep walkers wondering.
A daring and delightful thing to be
A stroller here—one always comes again!

II

THE PILGRIM MONUMENT

PROUDLY upon its sand-dune eminence,
An exclamation point against the sky,
Too lofty to be missed by any eye,
Presenting stone and concrete evidence
To land and sea, from Corn Hill to the Race,
That solidly substantiates the claim
Of Provincetown to Pilgrim-landing fame,
The monument puts Plymouth in its place!

By force of perpendicular dimensions,
It crushes all the famous rock's pretensions,
Its plain inscriptions make the matter clear,
"The *Mayflower* and the Pilgrims landed HERE!"
Should any doubting voice rise in dissent,
The answer is, "Behold the monument!"

III

ART STUDENTS

They crowd the curving beach in gay platoons,
Bright spots of color, variegated flocks
Of acolytes in flannels and in smocks,
Striving to catch on canvas brilliant noons
Whose gold regilds already golden sands;
Along each winding lane, each narrow street,
They follow beauty on expectant feet,
Striving to catch her garment in their hands.

Townsfolk and tourists pass them with a smile,
Each bending to an easel like a lover
Above his lady's lips, unheeding while
Some sudden motorist well-nigh turns over
A picture that may prove the argosy
Of high young hopes and dreams, of fame to be!

DAWN AT SHIPPAN

I LOVE the way the harbor looks at dawn
On misty mornings, when the earth and sky
And water seem to meet in some pale tryst
Of indistinguishable amethyst
And gray.

As yet, there is no faintest hint
Of later rose and gold. The anchored boats
Are phantom ships at harbor in a dream.
Their riding lights, hung high on ghostly arms,
Burn dully in the dawn, as burn the eyes
Of some late reveler returning home.

There is no commerce on the bay's still breast;
No throb of engine; and no splash of oars;
There is no calling voice, not any sound
Save that the waking birds trill in the dawn,
And screaming gulls shrill on the water there,
While on the reef the lighthouse fogbell calls,
And to the west a distant siren moans.

I am alone in all the universe,
By right of waking, it belongs to me!
I own the ships; they are my argosies
Of happy dreams that have come back to me;

They are my phantom caravels of hope,
And they are waiting, patient, in the mist,
To take me far and far and far away!
For this one waking hour of solitude
I master fate—and I am free to go!
I love the way the harbor looks at dawn!

A SQUALL ON THE SOUND

Dead calm; a golden haze. The tall, white sails
With no small breeze to blow life into them,
Are great, still, silken moths, embroidered
Upon the deep blue satin of the Sound.
Above them, in the sky-sea overhead,
White cloud-sails are becalmed, too, and they match
In idleness the breathless boats below.
The far, dim shore is but a soft, dark scarf
Flung round the shoulders of the world, this world
Of sea and sky. Can there be other worlds?
There may be, but today we will forget
The life back there on shore. Was it, now, true?
Oh, surely not! It was a troubled dream;
And this is life, to drift, forgetting quite
The old shore-dream; it will not come again!

The tiller—quick! The sheets! A sudden stir,
And all the water takes to shuddering,
Its face fear-faded to a dull drab-green,
At blasts from thunder-turrets in the sky
That late were white dream-towers, drifting by;
The lightning is a naked sword that gleams
And flashes and the wind, a fiend that screams;
The boats, a milling and bewildered herd

That flee before it, blind to where they go!
Far off, upon the water's anxious face,
A thin white line comes up like creeping fear,
And then, the fierce, slant fury of the rain!

Oh, where, where is the harbor? "Not this way!"
The warning bell-buoy cries. "Keep off! Keep
off!"
Echoes the horn on Captain's Island Light. . . .
The straining boats go beating blindly on!
Then suddenly the wind dies down; the rain
Recedes. Once more the light comes creeping back.
And Greenwich steeple stands against the sky,
High on its hill, to point the mariners
Back to the harbor and, at last, the shore!

FIFTH AVENUE

I

THE seven seas bring caravels to you
And desert ships that plow the billowed sands
Bear cargoes for you from the far-off lands.
You are their journey's end, Fifth Avenue!
Your windows show the pomps and artistries
Of every country and of every clime;
You take your tribute from today and time.
You flaunt the plunder of the centuries!

You stir adventurers to daring deeds.
Men who will never see you, challenge death
In deep sea-caverns, brave the jungle's breath
To please your fancies, satisfy your needs.
Around the world, men strive and sweat and press
To win from you the nod that spells success.

II

These furs incarnadined the Arctic snow;
From Africa's hot heart these gems were torn;
In ancient Spain this flowered shawl was worn;
These gowns are from a Paris fashion show;
This antique plate is England's offering;
Here is a painted saint—Italian;

This rug knew padding feet in Turkestan;
Here is a vase wrought in the time of Ming.

Your splendor sweeps and stretches, mile on mile.
I saunter gayly here, and for the while
That on your bright, embellished way I go,
I am a traveler of parts, a voyager
To all the ports of earth, adventurer
To lands and cities I shall never know!

I HAVE SEEN YOUR TOWERS

They say, my city, you are worshiper
  At but two shrines,
    And that you bend the knee
  To two gods only,
    Gain and Gaiety—
By day, a shrewd and careful bargainer;
By night, a reveler, a roisterer,
  You dream no dreams, they say;
    You do not see
  Visions beyond your greed
    And revelry.
They find you earth-bound, sordid, sinister!

But I have seen your towers cleave the night,
  Have seen them reach,
    Up through the dark, soft blue
For stars. And I, I read your soul aright.
  I know you dream,
    And that your dreams come true—
Are they not dreams, those lifting towers of light,
  Visions your poet-builders
    Caught from you?

ON BROOKLYN HEIGHTS

On Brooklyn Heights there is a quiet street.
  Past solid rows of homes it takes its way;
  But at the end it looks upon the bay,
The splendid shining bay, where great ships meet,
Where busy little tugs, on errands fleet,
  Dart in and out among, like lads at play!
  A stirring sight—I watch it every day
From the small park that ends the quiet street.

Great things are going on before my eyes.
Across the bay, Manhattan's towers arise,
And high above them all a birdman flies!
Life calls to me out there, and strange thoughts
    come!
Ah, what if one were free to dare, to roam?
But on the quiet street back there is—home!

WHEN SPRING COMES UP THE SHENANDOAH

WHEN Spring comes up the Shenandoah
It is a rush, a sally;
Swift as a blush on beauty's cheek
She flushes up the Valley!

She passes as in royal state,
The rivers rush to meet her,
The mountains smile as she goes by,
The orchards bloom to greet her.

All beauty's cohorts, lining up,
Salute their sovereign, passing;
The vagrant breezes mobilize,
Their fragrant forces massing.

The birds make music for her march,
The hoarse bees add their humming;
The joyful cattle on the hills,
Deep-throated, hail her coming.

The dogwood flings white banners out
To greet her every turning,
And high on steep, blue mountain sides,
Are redbud beacons burning.

So Spring comes up the Shenandoah;
I, who have seen her, pity
Those who must be content to see
Her passing in a city!

LEE ON STONE MOUNTAIN

O MOUNTAIN, lonely in your majesty,
You are companioned now eternally.

For now you bear him on your breast sublime
Who is borne, deathless, on the shield of time.

As you stand there in lone sublimity,
So, lonely, was the lifted soul of Lee.

As you stand changeless there against the sky,
So shall he stand against eternity.

Strong as the granite of your heart today,
Was he for that part it was his to play.

As far as is your summit from the plain,
So far was he from thought of self or gain.

As you by clouds have often been obscured,
So doubt, misunderstanding, he endured.

But he stood firm, unwavering and strong,
As you have stood here through the ages long.

Now lonely nevermore nor you, nor he;
His comrades there will bear him company.

And you will be for all eternity
Companioned by the mighty soul of Lee.

You bear him now upon your breast sublime
Who is borne, deathless, on the shield of time.

AMERICANS IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Let us who come here from a land afar
Go quietly
In this dim, solemn place
Where England's grief and England's glory are;
This shrine that holds for us
A special grace.
Tread softly, feet, above this deathless dust
Of sovereign, soldier,
Poet, priest and peer,
The heart of England is
Enshrinèd here!
Look reverently, O eyes, on every bust;
Read and remember
Each emblazoned name
Inscribed here on this
Final scroll of fame.

But, hearts American, beat high, beat high,
Remembering that we
Share proudly, too,
This grief, this glory;
That in me and you
Runs blood that binds us in an ancient tie.

Here we forget the wide, dividing sea.
This English dust belongs to you and me!

"PAMPHAIOS MADE ME"

Inscription on a Black-Figure Greek Vase
in the British Museum

PAMPHAIOS made me." You who pause today
To stand before me in this alien land
Will find it written here in his own hand,
Who wrought me from the clay.

Pamphaios made me, yes, in time long gone!
Still in Pentelicus embosomed deep,
Uncalled as yet by man from marbled sleep,
The Parthenon dreamed on.

So dim, so dim that ancient Attic spring!
The world was young and it was eager then
And wonder still welled in the hearts of men
At earth's glad burgeoning.

And men went reverently, though half in fear,
Each dreaming, and yet dreading it might be
That in the dusk of some dim forest, he
Would see a god appear.

Attuned to his own time, Pamphaios wrought,
Singing the while for joy in his own skill
To summon shape from out of dream at will
And give a form to thought.

So, singing, working, dreaming, wondering, he
  Wrought in me by the magic of his art
  The glory of his time, of his own heart
And their simplicity.

Dust long ago, the hand that fashioned me,
  And dust, the dreams of men! The gods are
    gone,
  Faith is as shattered as the Parthenon.
The world goes wearily.

But here, by chance, or some decree of fate,
  Surviving all, unbroken still, I stand
  In this strange room, in this far, foreign land,
For men to contemplate.

And still the spring of Hellas lives in me.
  I summon back the gods to earth again
  And reawaken faith in weary men—
If they have eyes to see!

PARIS

She hails you gayly,
  Bidding you rejoice,
And all the world
  In eagerness complies.
Who hears the minor
  Cadence in her voice?
Who reads the old
  Remembrance in her eyes?

No hint escapes
  Of tragedies she knew,
No sign of grief
  That once encompassed her.
Within the cup
  She pours to offer you
There are no dregs
  Of aloes, rue, or myrrh.

She has a strange and subtle charm for men,
This widow who has learned to smile again!

IN THE LOUVRE

And then I saw her!
  Somehow, suddenly,
My eyes, my own eyes, unbelievably,
Beheld her I had come so far to see.

I was not dreaming, no;
  I looked to where
The lovely, armless thing with parted hair
Had always been in dream. And she was there!

Serene, aloof,
  In her recess, alone—
Behind her, velvet of a sombre tone—
The inexpressible, expressed in stone.

Perfection,
  By some ancient master wrought
In marble, by his passion, toil and thought
From formlessness to mortal vision brought.

Eternal beauty,
  Dreamed and fashioned then
To gladden earth forever, even when
The dream of beauty dies in living men.

Immortal grace
  Of lines that curve and flow,
To mock at schools of art that come and go
And little, mouthing men who claim to know.

And now, remembering her,
  I muse and smile
At all of those mutations we call style,
And I am comforted a little while.

TO MONA LISA, SMILING

In Her Portrait in the Louvre

I, LATELY come, with wonder in my eyes,
A sister woman from across the sea,
Am newly stirred by your old mystery;
The ancient riddle of the smile that lies
Upon your lips, that reticent and wise,
Strange smile in which veiled femininity,
Portrayed by Leonardo's artistry,
Defies conjecture and eludes surmise.

What does it mean, that smile, O subtle one?
The world of men has argued pro and con
But no solution has been hit upon.

My guess is this—a woman-guess, mayhap:
You had a sense of humor! In your time
This counted in a woman as a crime—
Indeed, in this is still a handicap!
You laughed at life and men. No woman should
Who would be named among the true and good.
But he, your limner, caught and half revealed
What every woman knows is best concealed.

NOTRE DAME DE PARIS

HERE is pure music patterned on the air,
  Orchestral rhythm caught in carven stone,
  Each rippling grace-note, every mellow tone
Transmuted into beauty none could bear,
But that ironic gargoyles, grinning there
  In carefully contrived cacophony,
  Give refuge from too perfect harmony
As when, in symphonies, the trumpets blare.

The solemn nave is a processional
  Transposed by sculptors' chisels for the eye;
  Each tower, an anthem chanted to the sky—
But springing, soaring high above them all,
The fragile, fretted spire lifts, fine and thin,
The lyric, last note of a violin!

I SAW THREE TEMPLES

The three ruined temples at Paestum, in lower Italy, are all that remains of the Greek city of Posidonia, which flourished there in the sixth century B.C.

I SAW three temples, dead and desolate,
Between the purple mountains and the sea.
About them lay a level, lonely plain
Where bloomed the flower of death, the asphodel,
Above an ancient city buried there.

Upon the plain a placid peasant drove
A brace of milk-white oxen to the plow,
Across the sunken city's walls and towers,
Upturning carelessly the fallow dust
That time had made of Posidonia.

I watched the plowman bend to toss aside
Some fragment that had struck against the blade.
Was it the shattered image of a god,
One of the long-forgotten gods whose shrines
Stood vast and vacant there before my eyes,
In beauty terrible?
Beholding them,
I heard the thunder of the centuries;
I glimpsed again the splendid, ancient days,

When, by the grace of great Poseidon,
This buried city's ships bestrode the waves;
When far-off harbors knew her daring sails;
When there was noise and commerce in her streets.

I heard the singing in the temples there;
The chanting priests, the lowing bullocks wreathed
For sacrifice, the shouting worshipers
Who fling their supplications and their prayers
Up to the gods, the gods so quiet, now,
Beneath the furrows of the peasant's plow,
So silent there below the asphodel.

Only the bare, brown columns, standing stark
Against the unremembering sky, remain
Between the purple mountains and the sea.
Three lonely temples on a level plain. . . .
And all about them blooms the flower of death!

ON LEAVING THE BAY OF NAPLES

O HEART, forever hold this loveliness!
Eyes, drink it in; record it, memory,
Against the time when my great need shall be
For beauty's comforting. Then, in the press
Of little living, I shall close my eyes.
Again mauve mountains, dark in majesty,
Lift from the gentian meadows of the sea
Up to the bright, improbably blue skies

And high above, like some dark doom impending,
Its spiral threat eternally ascending,
To mock at all the littleness of us,
Bulks, unbelievable, Vesuvius—
Wearing above its heart, lest men forget,
Proud, dead Pompeii like an amulet!

But heedless there, upon the other side,
Remembering no more one dreadful night,
The living Naples leans, entrancing, white,
Upon the giant's breast, like some new bride;
And here Sorrento wears her careless crown
Of oranges and hangs upon the air
Her colored cliffs, like Moslem rugs of prayer,
Forgetful, or defiant, of his frown.

Capri and Ischia, in a golden haze,
Dream on the dim horizon of the days
When Jason and Ulysses, voyaging,
Past these bright shores, heard strange sea-women
sing
To lure the daring mariners to shore,
Who, if they listened, fared to sea no more.

Yes, I shall close my eyes and see them all,
White cities and dim islands and blue bay;
Gay sails that flit, like tropic birds at play,
And shimmering cliffs and mountains dusk and
tall;
They will be credible—to memory,
Perceptible to inner sight and sense,
Enshrined, forever in the present tense.
My lips will say, "I saw"; my heart, "I see!"

Against the drabness that the years may bring,
This, this shall be my shield, remembering
What here today so unimaginably lies
Today before my unbelieving eyes;
Fearless of life, I shall go bravely hence.
I shall have beauty for my bright defense!

PART THREE

DE HUNTIN' CALL

Red bird flashin' in de cedar,
Sassy, lak he showin' off;
Jay bird quoilin' sump'n ructious;
Win' a-blowin', sweet an' sof'!

Robins drunk on Cheeny berries;
'Simmons ripe up in de tree;
Pa't'idge callin' in de bushes;
Seem lak he is callin'—me!

Georgia hills red in de sunlight;
Cullies green wid bamboo vine;
Shet mah eye, an' I kin see 'em,
Feel de win' an' smell de pine!

Houn' dog bayin' in de moonlight;
Coon an' 'possum in de tree;
Shotgun hangin' up so handy—
Only thing ain' dere is—me!

Georgia niggah got no bizness
In New Yawk—not none a-tall!
I cyarn run no elevator
When I heah de huntin' call!

THAT AFFAIR IN EDEN

I KNOWS de white folks reads it in de Bible,
'Bout how it wuz a apple caused de fall
O' Eve an' Adam, back dere in de gyarden.
But it warn't dat way, honey, not a-tall!

Cause who's a goin' to sin—jes' foh a apple?
I ax you dat! When you done sin yuh sin,
What is you got? What is a apple nohow,
But jest' a chaw or two an' seeds an' skin?

But watermelons, now, is sumpin' diffunt!
De sarpint, he too ole an' smart an' slick
To was'e he time a-foolin' wid a apple.
It wuz a watermelon, chile, dat done de trick!

Umph-umph, dat's right, jes lak I say! De melon
Wuz hangin' dere in Eden on de tree.
What's dat you say? Dat dey don't grow on trees,
chile?
Wuz you dere in de gyarden, den, to see?

Cause t'ings in dem days, all of 'em, wuz diffunt—
De watermelon den growed on a tree,
High up, plain in de sight o' Eve an' Adam.
De sarpint knowed his bizness, believe me!

When he done 'suade 'em once to steal an' tas'e it,
He knowed no human bein' cyarn resis';
Dat sinners would go on a-stealin' melons,
Fum dat day, honey, right on down to dis!

De Lawd, he knowed it, too, and cussed de sarpint.
He take he foots away an' make him crawl,
An' He sont Eve an' Adam out de gyarden—
But He ain't done yet! Naw, chile, dat ain't all!

De Lawd he also cussed de watermelon;
He say it cyarn hang no mo' on de tree;
It got to grow whar it cyarn temp' po' sinners
By hangin' up so plain foh dem to see!

What's dat you answer back? You cyarn believe it?
Why, chile, when you says dat, yo' mammy grieves. . . .
Ain't you take notice dat de watermelon
Grows on de groun' now, kivered up wid leaves?

QUALITY

Heah in New Yawk I sees people
In de subway an' de street
Dress-up fine an' wearin' di'monds,
Lookin' grand an' smellin' sweet.

I jes' passes an' looks at 'em,
But nohow dey don't fool me!
Don't nobody haf to tell me
Dat *dey* ain't de quality.

Down in Cha'lston, whah I come fum,
Quality don' wear dey bes'
When dey go whah folks 'll see 'em;
Plain an' quiet-like dey dress.

Dey got silks an' satins, plenty,
Dey got clo'es an' jewelry,
But dey don't want none to see 'em
'Cept de yuther quality.

Dey got gyardens roun' dey houses,
Front do' bell is on de gate.
Wall so high dat folks cyarn see in;
Dem dat rings is got to wait.

W'en I buttled on de Batt'ry,
I learned 'bout de quality,
How dey keep dey bes' t'ings *private,*
Gyardens, clo'es an' jewelry!

So I don't take no stock a-tall
In dese dress-up folks I see
On de street an' in de subway—
I knows dey ain't de quality!

CARPE DIEM

Horace—in Ethiopia

MAH day is today!
You kin have, I say,
Tomorrow—which ain' come,
Yistiddy—which done gone;
Take 'em bofe, I say,
But—gimme today!

Today is mah fren',
Today's de day I spen'!
Yistiddy I borrow,
Got to pay tomorrow,
But today I spen',
Yas, today's mah fren'!

Melon's ripe an' fine—
Leave it on de vine?
Nossuh! Time to eat
Is when de melon's sweet!
Today de melon's fine—
Today de melon's mine!

Hi! Whut dat I see?
Possum in de tree?

Got to wait to cotch him?
Tomorrow go to fotch him?
Not much! No, sirree!
Today's de day foh me!

Honey-gal is kin'—
She mought change her min',
Come another day.
Bes' make sho, I say!
Kiss her whilst she's kin',
She mought change her min'!

Lady Luck don' smile
But a little while!
I's gwine to make mah play
Whilst she smile—today!
Lady Luck don' smile
But a little while!

Trouble come today?
I say, "Back away!
Git out, ole man Sorrow!
Call eroun' tomorrow!
Ain't you heah me say
Dat today's mah day?"

GREENE STREET

De folks up heah is mighty fond o' talkin'
'Bout whut a fine street is Fif' Avenue.
But ef dey ever sot dey eyes on Greene Street,
Dey wouldn' keep a-tonguin' like dey do!

Whah at is Greene Street—is dat whut you ax me?
Why, Lawsy me, you don' know whah it's at?
De fines' street dat's in Augusta, Georgia—
Why, sholy you ain't ign'ant as all dat?

Fif' Avenue is fine—ain' no disputin',
But it ain' got no gyardens, trees, ner grass;
De houses on it sets too close togedder
An' de mortymobiles on it goes too fas'.

But Greene Street got fo' rows o' ellums on it.
Two roadways wid a strip a pahk between,
Whah chilluns gadders wid dey colored mammies
An' plays de livelong day dere on de Green.

De quality lives in de residences
Gret red brick houses, set back fum de street,
Wid big, white, fluted colyums on de po'ches,
And tall magnolias roun' 'em, bloomin' sweet!

Me live on Greene Street? 'Cose I did—quit laffin'
'Cause I wuz bawn dere, yessuh, dat's a fac'!
My mammy, she wuz cook in Jedge Blair's fambly
An us lived in de quahtahs at de back.

I 'members when I wuz a pick'ninny,
How ca'yage callers use to come an' go.
On Greene Street, den, dere wan't no mortymobiles
To knock you flat, de fus' thing you don' know!

Victorias, wid long-tailed, prancin' hosses,
An' colored coachmen, dress-up, use to come
An' pretty ladies use to ring de do' bell,
An' ax de butler wuz de ladies home.

Oh, wa'al, I know dem days is gone forever,
An' mebbe Greene Street, now, is done change',
too.
Prehaps now it got mortymobiles on it
De same as dese here on Fif' Avenue!

I dunno . . . bin so long since I done lef' it
An' come up Norf, to make mah fortune
quick . . .
Sometimes whilst I's a-cleanin' out de gutters
Here on Fif' Avenue, I gits—homesick.

Whilst I's a-sweepin', dodgin' mortymobiles,
I's smellin' tall magnolias bloomin' sweet,
An' heahin' chilluns, seein' pretty ladies,
A-ca'yage callin' up an' down Greene Street.

RIVER

Sumpin' 'bout a river,
  Kind o' gets you—sho'!
Dunno what, erzackly,
  Jes' know dat it's so,
Dat you heah it callin',
  Don' keer whah you go!

You cyarn he'p but lissen,
  Kind o' makes you mad!
Sumpin' 'bout its callin'
  Kind o' makes you sad—
Lak you done los' sumpin',
  Mebbe, once you had!

I's a city niggah,
  Now I done forgot
All my country raisin'
  Down dere whah it's hot.
River keeps a-callin',
  Sayin', "You ain' not!

"You bleeged to remember
  How I use to flow
Th'u de cane an' brambroo,
  By yo' cabin do'—

Nussed you on mah buzzum,
You remembers, sho'!

"All mah chilluns wanders,
But dey don' ferget!
Dey comes back to fin' me—
I don' never let
Go of 'em forever,
You'll be comin' yet!"

I say: "River, nossuh,
I don't want to heah!
I's a city niggah,
Good job, by de yeah,
Ain' no use, yo' callin'—
I gwine shut mah eah!

"Nossuh, I ain' goin'!
I don' want to go!
Plantin' corn an' cotton,
Like I done befo',
In de river bottom,
Ain' foh me no mo'!"

Plenty noises roun' me
In de city street,
Plenty street cyars passin',
Plenty folks I meet,
Plenty autos tryin'
Knock me off mah feet!

How come I keep hearin',
'Bove an' over all,
All de city noises,
Still de river call?
'T ain't no 'magination,
Nossuh, not a-tall!

I cyarn he'p but lissen—
Kind o' makes me mad!
Sumpin' 'bout its callin'
Kind o' makes me sad—
Lak I done los' sumpin',
Mebbe, once I had!

Sumpin' 'bout a river
Kind o' gets you—sho'!
Dunno what, erzackly,
Jes' know dat it's so—
Keeps a callin', callin'
'Twell you—up an' go!

PART FOUR

TO THE BANDUSIAN FOUNTAIN

BOOK III, ODE XIII

It is generally supposed that Horace had in mind a favorite spring of his Sabine farm. Some have imagined that on coming into possession of his new home he used there a name familiar to him in the place of his birth.

O FOUNTAIN of Bandusia,
Than crystal's self more crystalline,
Well worthy, thou, of proffered wreaths
And votive wine.

A tender kid whose budding horns
Love and love's wars prognosticate
I'll fetch for thee tomorrow morn
And dedicate.

Gay youngling of a wanton herd,
For him they prophesy in vain,
Those hopeful horns! Thy cold, clear deeps
His blood shall stain.

The dog-star's heat can never touch
Thy leaf-protected, shadowed pool,
Where plow-freed ox and straying flocks
Seek refuge cool.

Far-flung thy name and fame shall be
  Because I sing thy rocky caves
And leaning oaks that bend above
  Thy leaping waves.

A VETERAN FORSWEARS WAR

HORACE, BOOK III, ODE XXVI

To Venus

I've lived the life of any bachelor.
  Among the maidens
    I have waged love's wars.
I have been wounded, but I have my trophies;
  I've had my kisses,
    Though I bear my scars!

I'm ready now to lay my weapons down!
  Or rather, hang them up
    Upon the wall
Of sea-born Venus. Here, now, is my lute.
  I shall not need it
    Any more at all.

Here are my glowing torches; here, my bows
  And bars. Ah, take them,
    Queen and goddess, thou,
Of sunny Cyprus and of snowless Memphis.
  I'm mustered out of
    Thy sweet service now!

I've no more use for such accouterments
  To break through
    Any dear, resisting door—
But ah, who passes? Proud and pretty Chloe!
  Come, Venus, strike her,
    Aid me—just once more!

TO CHLOE

HORACE, BOOK III, ODE XXIII

As in the pathless woods, a fawn will flee
In danger to its dam, you fly from me.

There, Chloe, by your mother's side you stay;
She, timid, will not let you go away.

Spring whispers in the rustling leaves—and she,
She hears and understands . . . you, too, maybe!

As fears the fawn each lightest breeze, you fear
And tremble just to feel your lover near.

There in the copse, if but a lizard stir,
The doe is off and her young fawn with her.

So you and she both view me with alarm,
But, Chloe, sweet, I meditate no harm.

No tiger, I, to drag you to its lair,
Nor fierce Gaetulian lion, I declare.

So, timid little fawn-maid, stay your flight,
I will not tear that tender flesh so white!

But Chloe, soon the time for love is fled,
Beware, do not delay too long to wed!

Life, now, is calling, calling you to be
My love. Come, from your mother's side—to me!

TO LEUCONOË

HORACE, BOOK I, ODE XI

SEEK not, Leuconoë, to know
What length of life Jove will bestow
On you or me—
Such things, hid from our mortal eyes,
No Babylonian sorceries
Can make you see!

Oh, better far bravely to bear
What heaven sends! No tear, no prayer
Can soften Jove!
This winter that now drives the sea
Upon the rocks perhaps may be
Our last, my love!

Forbear to guess the god's design.
Instead, be wise and strain the wine—
Age comes apace.
Even as we talk, he steals on us
As though he might be envious
Of this day's grace!

Then let us, love, since life's brief span
Denies us hope, pluck while we can

This one bright hour,
Nor trust to future joys too much—
Our eager hands may never touch
Tomorrow's flower!

ON THE DEATH OF CLEOPATRA

HORACE, BOOK I, ODE XXXVII

Now is for drinking!
Drink! What's the odds?
In joy unthinking,
Feast the high gods!

Now is for pouring
Cæcuban cold,
Ancestral storing
In cellars old.

Now is for dancing!
Come, comrades, beat
Measures entrancing
With happy feet!

For the haughty Queen who would ruin Rome
Now is dead,
And the sycophants who surrounded her
Now are fled;
All in vain her wiles on our Cæsar's heart
Did she try;
And in vain her heady Egyptian wine
Did she ply;

Aye, the love she flung at our Cæsar's feet—
It was spurned;
And the stately ships of her once proud fleet
Now are burned;
As the hare, the hunter, she fled from him
In her fright;
And he followed her as the hawk, the dove,
In her flight.
Yet she shrank not back from the naked sword,
In her pride;
Nor in woman-fear, on some secret shore,
Would she hide.
With a stony face on her ruined walls
Did she look,
And the deadly asp in her cold white arms
Calmly took.
No captive's chains on those queenly arms
Would she wear;
And no master's look on a woman slave
Would she bear.
In the life of her, like a stately queen,
Did she move—
In the death of her, all her royal blood
Did she prove!

LET YOUR CONCERN BE YOUTH

HORACE, TO HIS FRIEND, HIRPINUS QUINCTIUS
BOOK II, ODE XI

Why fret yourself with what our foemen plan
  In Scythia or wild Cantabria
Against our peace? Between us and their wrath
  Rolls Hadria.

And why take thought for age? Its wants are
    few.
  Let your concern be youth, so quickly sped;
Its loves, its roses, its light-hearted sleep
  So soon are fled.

Spring flowers, however bright, must lose their
    bloom;
  Not long the moon will wear this lovely look.
Then ah, my friend, why turn your eyes from it
  To life's stern book?

High heaven's design you cannot comprehend,
  But here, beneath a plane tree or a pine,
Let us perfume and wreathe our silvering locks
  And quaff our wine.

Trust Bacchus to drive all the cares away
That eat our hearts. Let slave boys bring
Cool jars, to chill the warm Falernian,
From some clear spring.

Shall we have Lyde? That, indeed we will!
The coy, flirtatious jade who does her hair
In that distracting, simple, Spartan knot—
A golden snare.

Who'll hasten to her house to summon her
And bid her bring her ivory dulcimer?

A DIALOGUE

Of Reconciliation between Lovers

HORACE, BOOK III, ODE IX

HORACE:

"So long as I still pleased your fancy, sweet,
And no more favored one than I dared fling
His arms about your whitely gleaming neck,
I felt myself more blessed than Persia's king."

Lydia:

"And while you sighed for no one else but me,
Before my loving heart had yet been pained
To see blonde Chloe take your Lydia's place,
More proud than Roman Ilia I reigned."

Horace:

"Ah, true, the Thracian Chloe holds me now.
So sweet she looks, so sweetly plays the lyre,
That if the cruel fates would but spare her,
I'd gladly now, for love of her, expire!"

Lydia:

"And, Horace, I, who loved you fondly once,
Now burn for young Calais, a comely swain,
The Thurian Ornytus' son, for whom,
Would death pass him, I'd die, and die again."

Horace:

"But, Lydia, what if our old love should wake,
What if its one-time binding power returned,
What if you found my heart's door open wide,
Whence bright, usurping Chloe had been spurned?"

Lydia:

"Oh, Horace, then, though my new love were fair
As yonder star, beyond all other men,
And you, light-loved as cork, as quick to rage
As Hadria's sea, I'd turn to you again.

"Ah, yes, if you would open your heart's door,
I'd enter and be yours till death—once more!"

THE SEA OF LOVE

HORACE, BOOK I, ODE V

WHAT perfumed gallant now pursues
And hotly woos
You, Pyrrha, where your roses bloom
Or in your grotto's grateful gloom?

For whom do you now bind your hair,
O blonde, O fair—
Those bright, gold braids, so smooth and neat,
Deceitfully demure and sweet?

Your love is now a tranquil sea,
And on it, he
A little hour serenely sails—
O changing gods! O mounting gales!

Who thinks you'll be forever kind
Will change his mind,
Will learn to wonder and to guess
At fickle seas—and faithlessness.

All who before him sailed that sea
As trustingly,
As he who, happy, trusts you yet,
Are shipwrecked now; their garments, wet.

One fate your lovers suffer, all.
On Neptune's wall
My tablet and wet garments prove
I, too, have sailed that sea of love.

THE REPREHENSIBLE MODERNS

HORACE, BOOK II, ODE XV

Soon there will be no acres left at all
  Whereon a farming man can raise a crop,
If buying up the land by millionaires
  For their estates and houses does not stop.

Such palaces—so inappropriate
  To their surroundings—rise on every side!
And fishponds larger than the Lucrine lake
  Supplant the fertile pastures sweet and wide.

Now landscape gardens take the place of fields,
  With foolish flowers where olives used to grow;
We see no more the lovely native elm,
  But fancy, foreign trees set out for show.

How different in the time of Romulus
  And in unshaven Cato's sterner days!
Ah, me! How much more simple then was life,
  Before Rome learned these strange, new-fangled
    ways.

In those far times the Roman state came first
  And private fortunes then in Rome were small;
Men toiled and slaved, not for themselves alone.
  The public gain was the concern of all.

No plutocrat built then for his own use
A marble pergola or colonnade
That he alone might catch the cooling breeze
And take his ease there in the northern shade.

Ah, no! The Roman laws forbade all that
In ancient times! What was expended then
Adorned the city or the shrines of gods
And what was left went for the homes of men.

It was a splendid thing, so I've been told,
To be a Roman—in the days of old!

TO POSTUMUS—ON LIFE'S UNCERTAINTY

HORACE, BOOK II, ODE XIV

Ah, Postumus, ah, Postumus, the years,
The fleeting years, are flying, flying by!
Thou canst not put off age with piety,
Nor stay indomitable death with tears.

Thou mightest bring to Pluto every day
Three hundred bulls—the sacrifice were vain;
Thou couldst not thus escape his dread domain;
His dark stream waits; it is the common way.

Where Tityus and thrice-dead Geryon wait
Imprisoned, all men, Postumus, must go;
Or prince or peasant, each must pass below;
All, rich and poor alike, must share one fate.

In vain to try to guard this mortal breath,
To shrink from war, to shun the restless sea,
Or to escape fierce storms that peril thee;
Thou canst not hide from fate or hold off death.

Where dark Cocytus rolls its sullen, slow
And turgid current; where doomed maidens pour
Their futile waters; and where ever more
Toils Sisyphus, thou, Postumus, must go.

Thy lands, thy house, thy wife thou canst not take;
And thou must leave each loved, well tended tree.
Only the somber cypress thou shalt see;
The wealth that's thine today thou must forsake.

Thou art its transient master, O my friend!
A better man may soon have what is thine.
Thine heir tomorrow may unlock thy wine
For guests who praise him while they quaff thy blend!

OF IMMORTALITY

BOOK III, ODE XXX

Written by Horace as an epilogue to his first three books of "Carmina." There is a grace and frankness in the author's self-esteem which the verdict of the world has justified.

Now I have reared a lasting monument
That shall be more enduring than the brass
Of mighty Rome—in loftiness surpass
The pyramids of kings! It was not meant
That all of me should die. What's best of me
Shall never bow nor yield to Pluto's power;
This monument of mine, this singing tower
That I have built shall taste eternity!

Past all the powers the north wind can employ,
Beyond the wear of rain's corroding tears,
The slow grind of innumerable years,
It shall withstand time's forces to destroy!
So long as priests and worshipers shall climb
The Capitol, so long as vestals come
To offer to the gods the prayers of Rome,
So long my name and fame shall outwit time!

And even past Rome's boundaries my fame
Shall go. Aye, where the swift Aufidus rushes;

In Daunus' arid realm, where no stream gushes,
Barbarians unborn shall know my name.
I, who have mounted high from low degree,
Who first to Grecian metres set Rome's lays,
Claim for my brow a wreath of Delphic bays.
Oh, crown my pride, I pray, Melpomene!

(1)

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